



Interagency Critical Incident Peer Support

Peer Support Group Leader

Critical Incident Peer Support Group Leader

Like a Peer Supporter/Person of Equal Respect, an Interagency Peer Support Group Leader is a highly respected and trusted person from all aspects of national fire programs (dispatchers, engine crew members, hotshot and other crews, helitack, smokejumpers and many other specialties).

The difference between a Peer Supporter and a Group Leader is depth of experience and training. A Group Leader has participated in numerous assignments as a Peer Supporter and has had enough exposure to various incidents and contacts they are able bring "order to chaos" found after a critical incident. A Peer Support Group Leader is expected to navigate the "sea of good intentions," without drowning. They are about to implement the elements of an established program which has a set Standard of Care and established boundaries, defined in scope, what is appropriate along with the laws of ethical behavior; all while staying within the limits of their training and experiences and scope of practice.

Critical Incident Peer Support Group Leaders are required to keep confidences, committed to the program, willing to adhere to established limits and protocols, aware of their boundaries, and trained to seek guidance and assistance when appropriate. As Leaders, they are held to a high standard and must demonstrate respect and integrity for what crisis intervention is....and is not.

Supporting Managers and Leaders

Most often, managers or Agency Administrators who request Peer Support have no experience in the process, what the professional outcome will look like and their roles in the process itself. Because they are concerned about their employees, they may have very powerful opinions in what they want done, when they want it done, how they want it done, and unrealistic expectations of the final product. While these desires are most often very sincerely intended to support their employees, they may be based on the belief that "ordering CISM" is an immediate need response and that Peer Support Groups operate like Incident Management Teams.

The Peer Support Group Leader must have the right skill set to address political issues, lack of understanding of the process, and other influences that occur after an organization has experienced a critical incident, that cause those we are working for to sway the set process required to take place. The Peer Support Group Leader must be able to recognize these situations and be persuasive without being overbearing or disrespectful of the situation.

Training and Qualifications

- Successful completion of the [International Critical Incident Stress Foundation](#) Assisting Individuals and Groups in Crisis course.
- Successful completion of the ICISF Advanced Assisting Individuals and Groups in Crisis course.
- Experience in multiple Critical Incident Peer Support Groups assignments as a Peer Supporter.
- Successful completion of one trainee assignment with a qualified Peer Support Group Leader.



Group Leader Duties

- Function as the liaison between the local unit and the peer support group.
- Provide the team members with reporting times, lodging and meeting locations.
- Coordinate with Clinician(s) in determining the appropriate crisis intervention tactics to be applied with specific individuals and groups.
- Briefing the Clinician as to what our expectations are for the meetings and travel.
- Allocate peer supporters based on background and culture.
- Coordinate with the group(s) daily when the groups are in multiple locations.
- Incident Business Management duties such as approving time, monitoring work/rest, and driving hours.
- Keep the coordinator informed as to the status of the assignment via daily call (s).
- Demobilization of resources and providing travel information Coordinator/Point of Contact, and dispatch center.

Caring for the Caregivers

Just as it is the responsibility of the CIPS Group to meet the needs those they serve in the field, it is also the responsibility of the Peer Support Group itself to take care of its own members after a response. Peer Supporters are not immune to the effects of direct contact with highly stressful events or from dealing with people with raw human emotions. The Peer Support Group Leader must be aware of the potential impact that their roles as peer supporters and group leaders can have on them personally. Peer Support Group members should practice the same techniques that they teach with regard to handling stress.

It is extremely important for Peer Support Groups to close-out with one and other prior to demobilization. At a minimum the following should be accomplished: review of mobilization and intervention response, attempt to understand what took place, develop and provide the coordinator with recommendations and follow-up items, and do a self-check prior to being released.

Coordinating with Investigation Teams

It is important to carefully coordinate with a variety of investigation teams assigned after a critical incident or line of duty death. The CIPS Group reports to the Agency Administrator and is a separate entity from any investigation process.

The CIPS Group Leader and the Serious Accident Investigation Team Leader will coordinate sequencing for interviews but remain completely separate. It is recommended, whenever possible, that the CIPS Group provide crisis intervention services for individuals prior to being interviewed by an investigative body. Some people are more affected than others and offering crisis intervention services prior to investigations and may help stabilize and start the recovery process. This also allows employees time to process the incident, reflect and bring clarity to what happened. Affected individuals may then be able to provide a more accurate and detailed description of what happened to the investigative team.

If Critical Incident Peer Support Services are requested for the investigation team, another CIPS Group will be mobilized so that there is no potential for conflict of interest or confidentiality issues.

Reporting and Documentation

The CIPS Group Leader is to collect only statistical information on the intervention, its location, and/or recommendations. The Critical Incident Peer Support Group Leader shall submit a post-deployment summary report to the Critical Incident Response Coordinator as soon as possible after each response. This final report shall include an overview of the response, after action review items, and recommendations for improvement. These reports will not contain any personal or confidential information and will be used only for the purpose of program administration, evaluation and oversight.

